United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Idaho Falls District
Upper Snake Field Office
1405 Hollipark Drive
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401-2100

In Reply Refer To:

9210

June 26, 2015

NOTICE OF FIELD MANAGER'S DECISION

Decision

After careful consideration, it is my decision to implement the Proposed Action for the Camas Butte, Deadman Native, Fred Butte, Hells Half Acre, Jefferson, Mesa, Table Butte, Table Legs Butte, Twin Buttes and West Cedar Butte treatment units. Furthermore, it is my decision to implement Alternative B for the Stage Road treatment unit as described in the Upper Snake Sagebrush Steppe Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-ID-I010-2015-0012-EA).

- Implementation of this decision would result in the treating of approximately 70,320 for the purpose of increasing sagebrush cover, improving native understory vegetation and reducing cheatgrass. Within the treatment footprint, 22,030 acres would be seeded via drilling or aerial application with native herbaceous (grasses and forbs) vegetation, 25,440 acres would be seeded via drilling or aerial application with a mix of native/non-native grasses and up to 47,470 acres would be chemically treated to reduce cheatgrass dominance. Additionally, selected areas within each of the treatment units would be strategically hand planted with sagebrush seedlings using augers to promote the repopulating of the site by sagebrush. The design criteria presented in the EA would apply to the elements discussed below.

  Sagebrush Hand Planting (Selected areas throughout all treatment units)
  Sagebrush seedlings would be planted at an approximate density of 100 seedlings per acre with a minimum spacing of 10 feet.

  Native Herbaceous Seeding (22,030 ac.)
  The native seeding would involve seeding degraded areas with native grasses and forbs. These seedings are needed to restore native plant diversity and structure to the identified treatment units.

Stage Road Native/Non-native Herbaceous Seeding (25,440 ac.)
The native/non-native seeding would involve the seeding of degraded areas with a mix of native and non-native grasses. This seeding is needed to provide a source of perennial grasses that would eventually out-compete cheatgrass, stabilize the soil and increase plant diversity and structure to the area.

Chemical Cheatgrass Reduction (47,470 ac.)
Chemical treatments would involve the application of herbicides at certain plant growth stages that would result in the demise of the targeted species. Chemical application(s) are required to reduce or eliminate the anticipated growth and competition of cheatgrass prior to fall plantings and seedings. The area would be sprayed with a single or combination of herbicides.

Design Features

- To avoid the spread of noxious weeds, no cross country vehicular travel would occur through areas with known noxious weed infestations. Additionally, prior to ground-disturbing activities, all mechanical equipment and vehicles would be cleaned of all vegetation (stems, leaves, seeds, and all other vegetative parts) in order to minimize the transport and spread of invasive plants seeds.

- The use of certified weed-free seed mixes would be required to prevent the introduction of invasive plants.

- As funding allows, the treatment areas would be monitored for the presence of noxious weed species prior to and following implementation. Any weeds that are identified would be treated in accordance with the *Upper Snake-Pocatello Integrated Weeds Control Programmatic Environmental Assessment* (DOI-BLM 2009).

- Ground-disturbing treatments would only occur between July 1 and December 31 so as to minimize impacts to sage-grouse, migratory birds and other wildlife species unless previously cleared by a wildlife biologist.

- A Class III inventory would be completed prior to the implementation of activities that may have an effect on cultural resources. All eligible or potentially eligible archaeological sites would be flagged prior to any ground-disturbing activities to avoid adverse effects. Sites that are located in areas proposed for treatment would be avoided.

- Should any sensitive plants be identified within the project area, sites would be flagged prior to any ground-disturbing activities to avoid adverse effects. Sites that are located in areas proposed for treatment would be avoided.

- Temporary Fence Construction

- Fence projects would be accessed using existing roads and trails.
- Cross-country travel would be restricted to the actual fence route.
- Only rubber-tired vehicles would be used during fence construction, alteration, or maintenance.
- Wildlife Timing Stipulations - Construction timing restrictions would be established by the Authorized Officer to reduce impacts to wildlife species during critical breeding, nesting, or wintering periods, unless previously cleared by a wildlife biologist, and would meet site-specific needs of affected wildlife species. Wildlife timing stipulations would include:
    - Construction activities would not occur within crucial wildlife winter ranges between the dates of November 15 and April 30.
    - Spring construction activities (March 1 to May 15) would be limited to between the hours of 9:00 am and 6:00 pm to avoid disturbing lekking sage-grouse.
    - Construction activities potentially disruptive to nesting greater sage/sharp-tailed grouse are prohibited during the period of May 1 to June 30 for the protection of strutting and nesting areas.
- Fence modification would be postponed if soils become saturated or ruts are produced by vehicles.
- All existing legal public vehicular and walk-in access areas would be maintained regardless of type of fence constructed.
- Fences constructed along the Stage Road (Goodale's Cutoff) would be offset a minimum of 150 feet from the road to protect cultural resources.

Rational

The implementation of both the Proposed Action and Alternative B would protect and expand vital Greater Sage-grouse habitat by reducing/removing cheatgrass, increasing perennial bunchgrasses and native forbs, and increasing sagebrush cover in areas previously disturbed by wildfire and other past disturbances. Alternative B was selected for the Stage Road treatment unit due to the repeated failed attempts to reseed native bunchgrasses and because the proposed treatments in Alternative B provide the highest likelihood for improving Greater Sage-grouse habitat. The proposed treatments would be designed to improve the health of the sagebrush steppe vegetation cover type identified within the project area. Under the Proposed Action and

Alternative B the following objectives would be met:

- Protect and promote healthy sagebrush steppe ecosystems by reducing the density of annual grasses and aid in the reestablishment of native grasses, forbs and shrubs.

- Improve the health, vigor, and acreage of the native sagebrush steppe vegetation.

- Improve wildlife habitat by providing multiple successional stages of more diverse vegetative communities.

Land Use Plan Conformance

The Proposed Action and Alternative B are in conformance with the following landscape-level objectives and management actions set forth in the Record of Decision for the *Big Desert Management Framework Plan* (DOI-BLM 1981) and *Medicine Lodge Resource Management Plan* (DOI-BLM 1985) as amended by the *Fire, Fuels, and Related Vegetation Management Direction Plan Amendment (FMDA) and Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision* (DOI-BLM 2008). The purpose of the amendment was to incorporate fire, fuels, and related vegetation management direction that is consistent with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy including the decision to "…maintain, or restore vegetation that would support special status species (SSS) habitat and healthy, diverse, and sustainable vegetative communities" (DOI-BLM 2008). Additionally, the Proposed Action and Alternative B are consistent with the *Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement* (DOI-BLM and USDA-USFS 2015) which address the management of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat in Idaho and portions of Montana and Utah.

The FMDA and Final Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision set objectives and management actions which follow:

> *Objective 1* - Make Progress toward Desired Future Conditions (DFC) in the Low-elevation Shrub, Perennial Grass, Invasive Annual Grass, Mid-elevation Shrub, Mountain Scrub, and Juniper vegetation types.
>
> *Management Actions:*
>
> - Use chemical, mechanical, seeding, and prescribed fire treatments as appropriate to achieve DFC.

- In perennial grass, invasive annual grass, and juniper-invaded cover types, restore sagebrush steppe with an aggressive sagebrush seeding effort, using the appropriate sagebrush subspecies for the treatment.

- Strategically place treatments on a landscape scale to prevent fire from spreading into important sagebrush steppe habitat or WUI.

Objective 2 – Maintain, protect, and expand sage grouse source habitats.

Management Actions:

- Conduct vegetation treatments in areas that pose a wildland fire risk to source habitats.

- Treat areas within source habitats that have a low resiliency (i.e., areas characterized by low species diversity, undesirable composition, and dead or decadent sagebrush).

Objective 3 – Treat sage-grouse key and restoration habitats to expand source habitats. Improve and maintain sage-grouse restoration and key habitats.

Management Actions:

- Conduct vegetative treatments in restoration and key habitats to reduce risk of wildland fire and reconnect restoration and key habitats.

- Treat areas of restoration and key habitats that have low resiliency characterized by low species diversity.

The Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed LUPA and Final EIS set objectives and management actions which follow:

Vegetation

Objective 1 – Reconnect and expand areas of higher native plant community integrity/rangeland health to increase the extent of high quality habitat and, where possible, to accommodate the future effect of climate change.

Objective 2 – Increase the amount and functionality of seasonal habitats by:

- Increase or enhance canopy cover and average patch size of sagebrush.

- Increase the amount, condition and connectivity of seasonal habitats.

- Increase understory (grass, forb) and/or riparian condition within breeding and late brood-rearing habitats.

- Reduce the extent of annual grasslands within and adjacent to PHMA and IHMA.

Vegetation Management Actions:

- *VEG-1:* Implement habitat rehabilitation or restoration projects in areas that have potential to improve GRSG habitat using a full array of treatment activities as appropriate, including chemical, mechanical and seeding treatments.

- *VEG-2:* Implement vegetation rehabilitation or manipulation projects to enhance sagebrush cover or to promote diverse and healthy grass and forb understory to achieve the greatest improvement in GRSG habitat based upon FIAT Assessments…..

- *VEG-3:* Require use of native seeds for restoration based on availability, adaptation (ecological site potential), and probability of success (Richards et al. 1998). Non-native seeds may be used as long as they support GRSG habitat objectives (Pyke 2011) to increase probability of success, when adapted seed availability is low or to compete with invasive species especially on harsher sites.

Wildland Fire Management

Objective 1 – Design fuel treatments to restore, enhance, or maintain GRSG habitat.

Fuels Management Actions:

- *FM-2:* Enhance (or maintain/retain) sagebrush canopy cover and community structure to match expected potential for the ecological site and consistent with GRSG habitat objectives unless fuels management objectives requires additional reduction in sagebrush cover to meet strategic protection of GRSG habitat……

- *FM-6:* Fuel treatments will be designed through an interdisciplinary process to expand, enhance, maintain, and protect GRSG habitat which considers a full range of cost effective fuel reduction techniques, including: chemical, biological (including grazing and targeted grazing), mechanical and prescribed fire treatments.

- *FM-13:* Prioritize the use of native seeds for fuels management treatment based on availability, adaptation (site potential), and probability of success. Where probability of success or native seed availability is low or non-economical, nonnative seeds may be used to meet GRSG habitat objectives to trend toward restoring the fire regime.

In addition to meeting the objectives for the project area and conforming to current management direction, these actions meet the purpose and need for action as presented in the EA. Moreover, the analysis presented in the EA and the accompanying Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) make clear that the implementation of these actions with associated design criteria and management restrictions identified in the EA would not result in significant impacts to the human environment and therefore an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Authority

Authority under which this decision is being issued is found in Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Subpart 4.410 – Appeals to the Board of Land Appeals.

Appeal Procedures

Any person/party whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal in accordance with 43 CFR 4.410, 4.411, 4.412, and 4.413 in person or in writing to Glen Guenther, Upper Snake Field Office Manager (Acting), at 1405 Hollipark Dr., Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401 within 30 days after receipt of such decision. The notice of appeal, if filed must include a statement of reasons for the appeal, a statement of standing if required by 43 CFR 4.412(b), and any arguments the appellant wishes to make. The person/party must also serve a copy of the appeal on the Office of the Solicitor, Boise Field Solicitors Office, University Plaza, 960 Broadway Ave., Suite 400, Boise Idaho, 83706 and person(s) named [43 CFR 4.421(h)] in the ***Copies sent to:*** section of this decision. The Interior Board of Land Appeals must decide an appeal of this decision within 60 days after all pleadings have been filed, and within 180 days after the appeal was filed as contained in 43 CFR 4.416.

Should you wish to file a petition for a stay, see 43 CFR 4.471 (a) and (b). In accordance with 43 CFR 4.471(c), a petition for a stay must show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
2. The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

As noted above, the petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer and serviced in accordance with 43 CFR 4.471. Any person named in the decision that receives a copy of a petition for a stay and/or an appeal see 43 CFR 4.472(b) for procedures to follow if you wish to respond.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact either Ben Dyer at (208) 524-7500 or myself at (208) 524-7500.

Approved by:

/s/ Glen Guenther, Upper Snake Field Office Manager (Acting) Dated: 6/26/2015

Copies sent to:

Natural Resource Conservation Service	9173 W. Barnes Dr. Ste. C, Boise, ID 83709
Idaho Department of Lands	3563 E. Ririe Hwy, Idaho Falls, ID 83401
Idaho Conservation League	710 N. 6th St., Boise, ID 83702
Idaho Department of Fish and Game – Region 5	1345 Barton Road, Pocatello, ID 83204
Idaho Department of Fish and Game – Region 6	4279 Commerce Circle, Idaho Falls, ID 83404
Greater Yellowstone Collation	60 E. Little Ave. Ste. 201, Driggs, ID 83422
Western Watersheds Project	126 S. Main St, Ste. B2
Wildlands Defense	P.O. Box 125 Boise, ID 83701
Idaho State Dept. of Agriculture	2270 Old Penitentiary Rd., Boise, ID 83712
U.S. Department of Energy - INL	1955 Fremont Ave, Idaho Falls, ID 83402
Chairman, Land Use Policy Committee, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes	Attn: Land Use Director, P.O. Box 306 Pima Dr., Fort Hall, ID 83203